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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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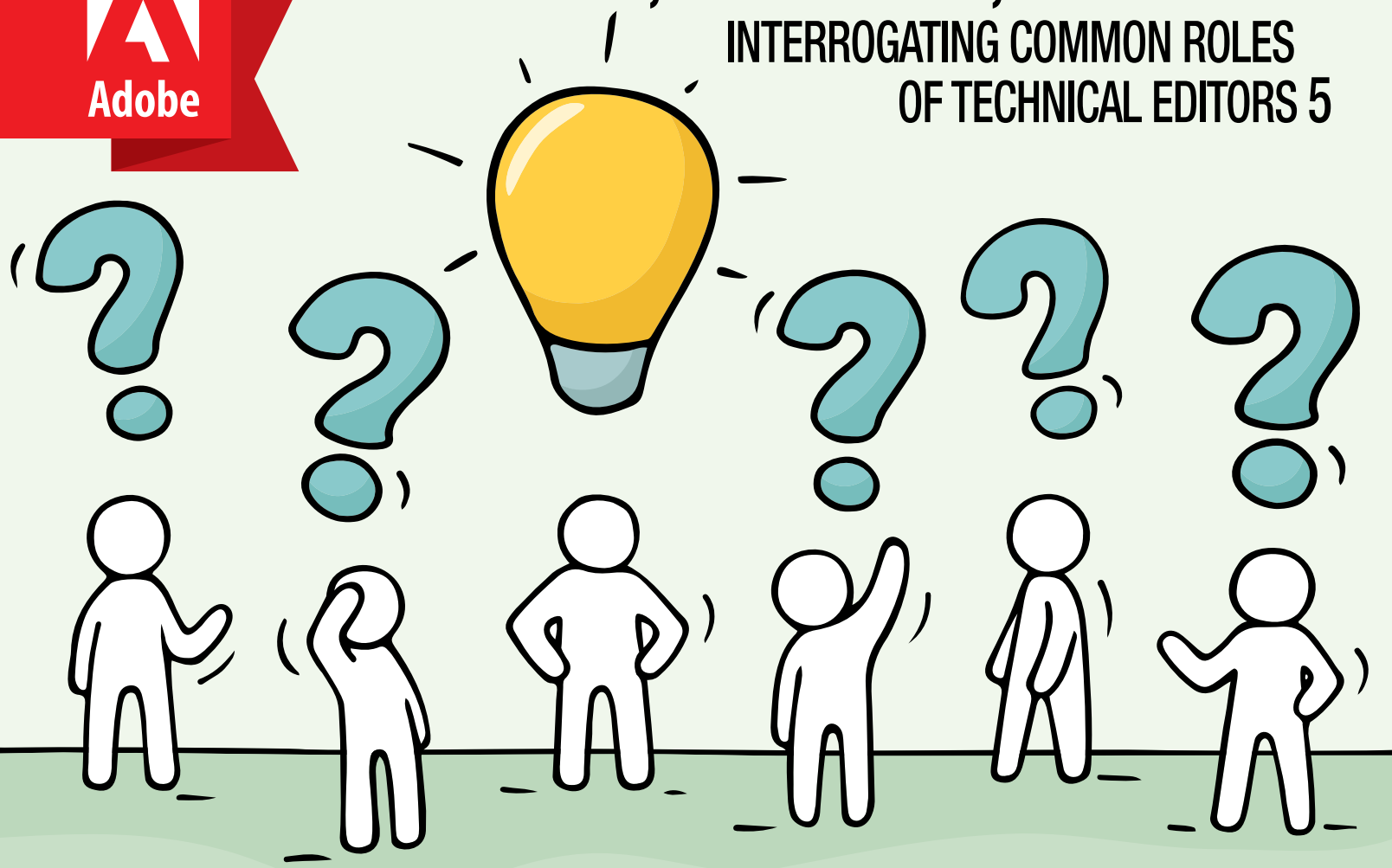
MECHANIC, MEDIATOR, MENTOR:
INTERROGATING COMMON ROLES OF TECHNICAL EDITORS 5



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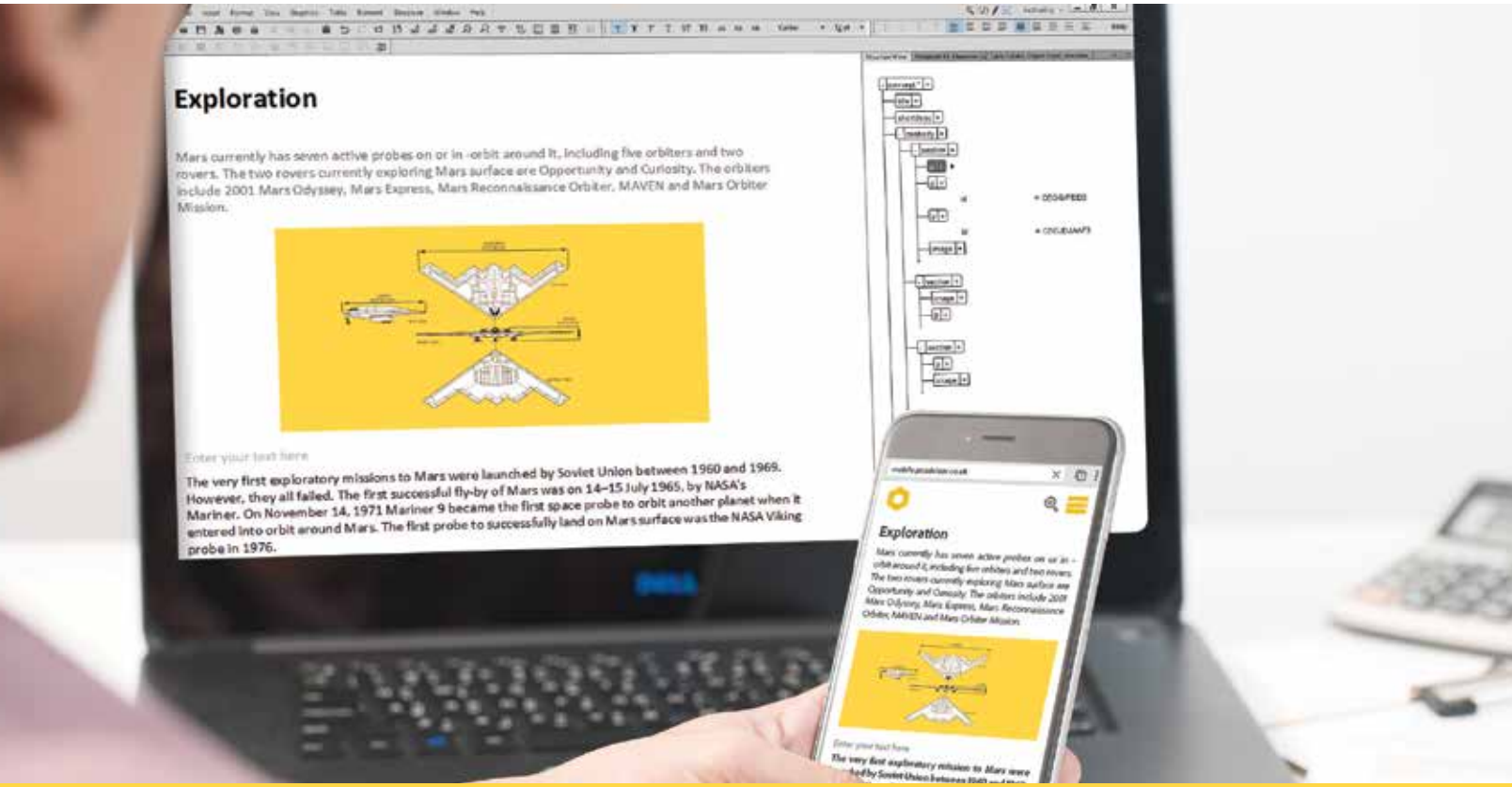
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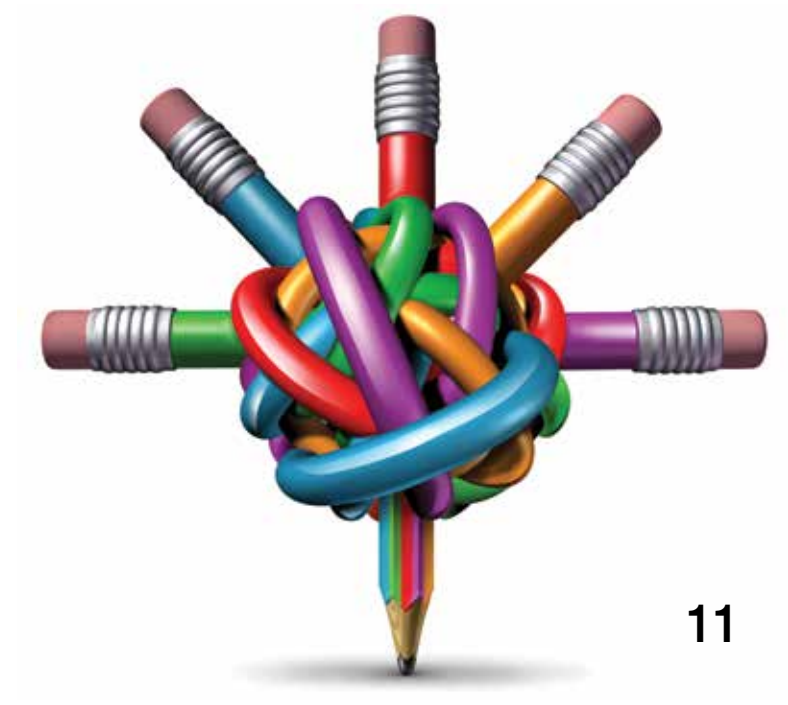

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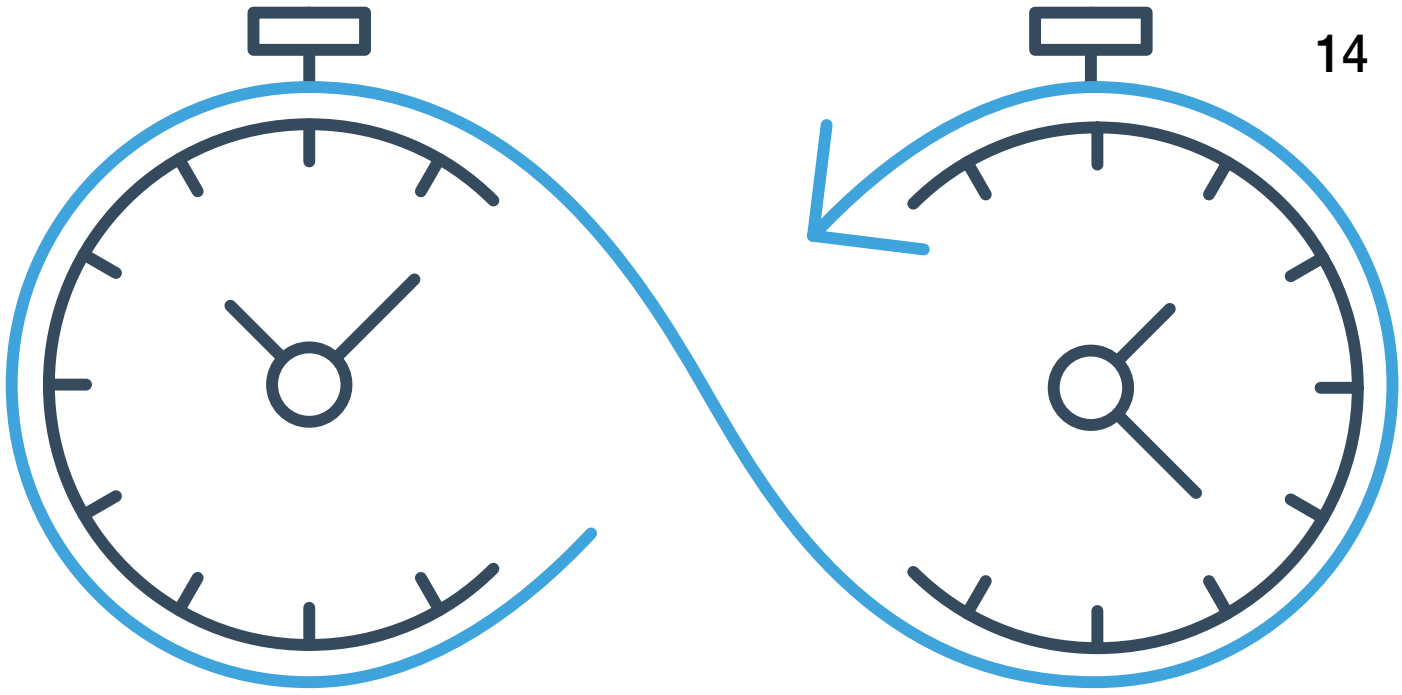

A Note from the Editor

JULY/AUGUST *INTERCOM* focuses on technical editing. My deep appreciation goes to Adobe for sponsoring this issue and to Li-At Rathbun and Shonell Bacon who helped solicit and edit much of the content. The authors, many of whom are members of STC's tech Editing SIG, have written six articles that discuss many different roles editors play, including "mechanics, mentors, and, mediators." As Bailey S. Cundiff proposes in her article, "Interrogating Common Roles of Technical Editors," it's best not to fight the roles, but to investigate how the metaphorical roles shape understandings of technical editing. She recommends four ways technical communicators can advocate for editors in practice.

In Sherri Leah Henkins's "My Top Three Editor Roles," we learn about the roles of peer reviewer, proofreader, and user experience editor. For each role, Sherri describes what it is, how she performs the role, and provides case studies from her own experience as an editor.

Jamie Gillenwater's article "How Complex Is Editing for Plain Language?" explains the main principles for an editor to evaluate documents for plain language—audience, emphasis, clarity, conciseness, active voice—and how to use Microsoft Word's spelling and grammar checker to automate plain language editing.

From his 30-year experience as an editor, Geoff Hart provides examples of just how easy it is to save time by investing time. He recommends using shortcuts, typing less, and finding motivation against such problems as software fatigue, writer's block, and stress. Geoff has also contributed a Witful Thinking article for this issue about the buzzword "content."

From a content marketing perspective, Danielle L. Karr has written an article on writing subject lines that won't end up in the audience's junk folder. She endorses some unique strategies in digital writing to build greater success with online communicating.

Richard Rabil Jr. has contributed an article on archiving wiki content in Confluence. He explain the challenges with archiving and offers both automated and manual solutions from his own experience with the tool.

This issue also includes a column by Ray Gallon on Information 4.0 and standards, as well as a Witful Thinking piece by Goeff Hart on the buzzword "content."

A reminder that the 2018 membership opens on 1 September and this is STC's 65th Anniversary! Stay tuned for special anniversary rates on membership and the Summit to be announced in September. And as always, please email me with your article ideas and feedback.

—Liz Pohland
intercom@stc.org

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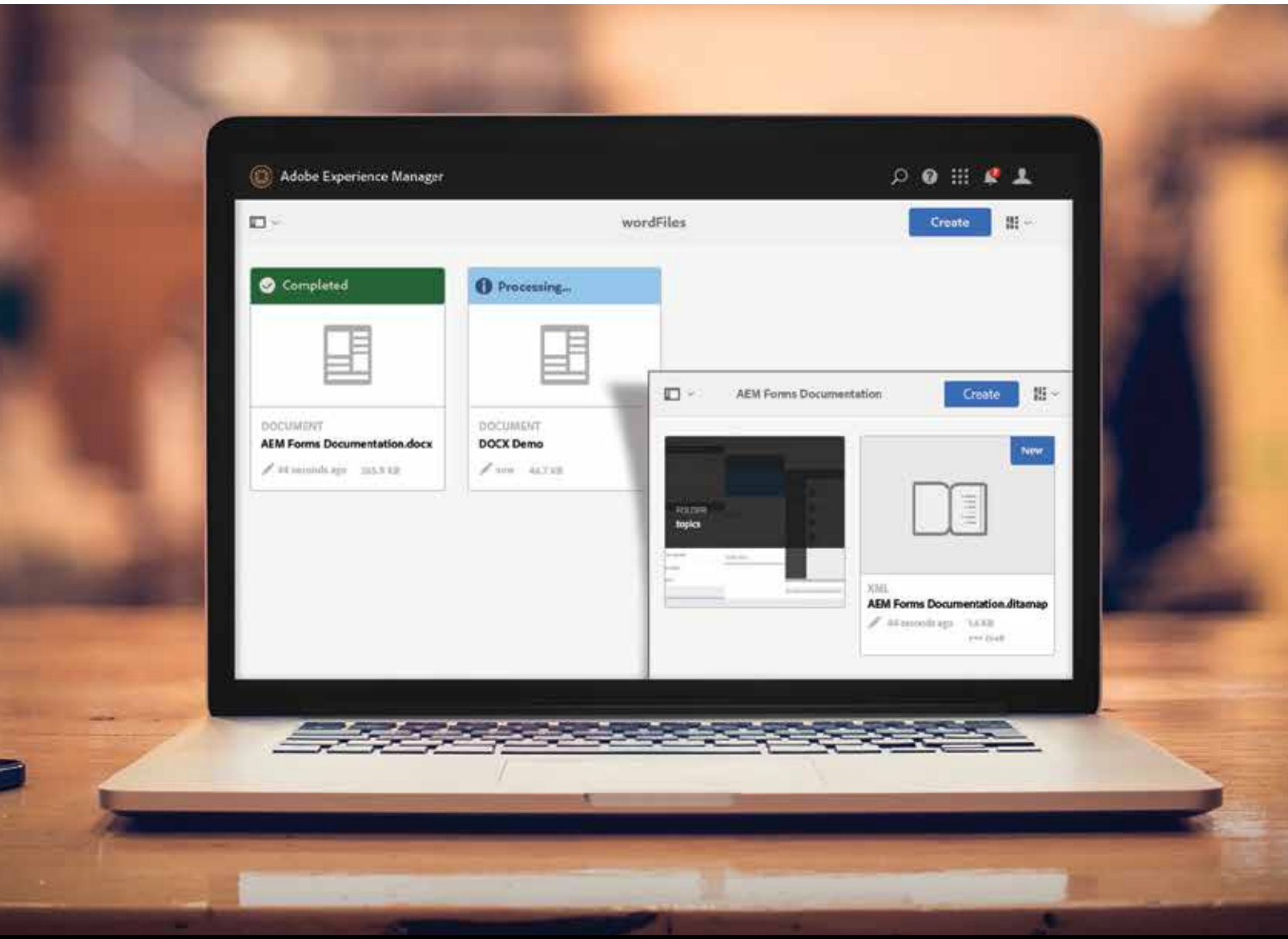

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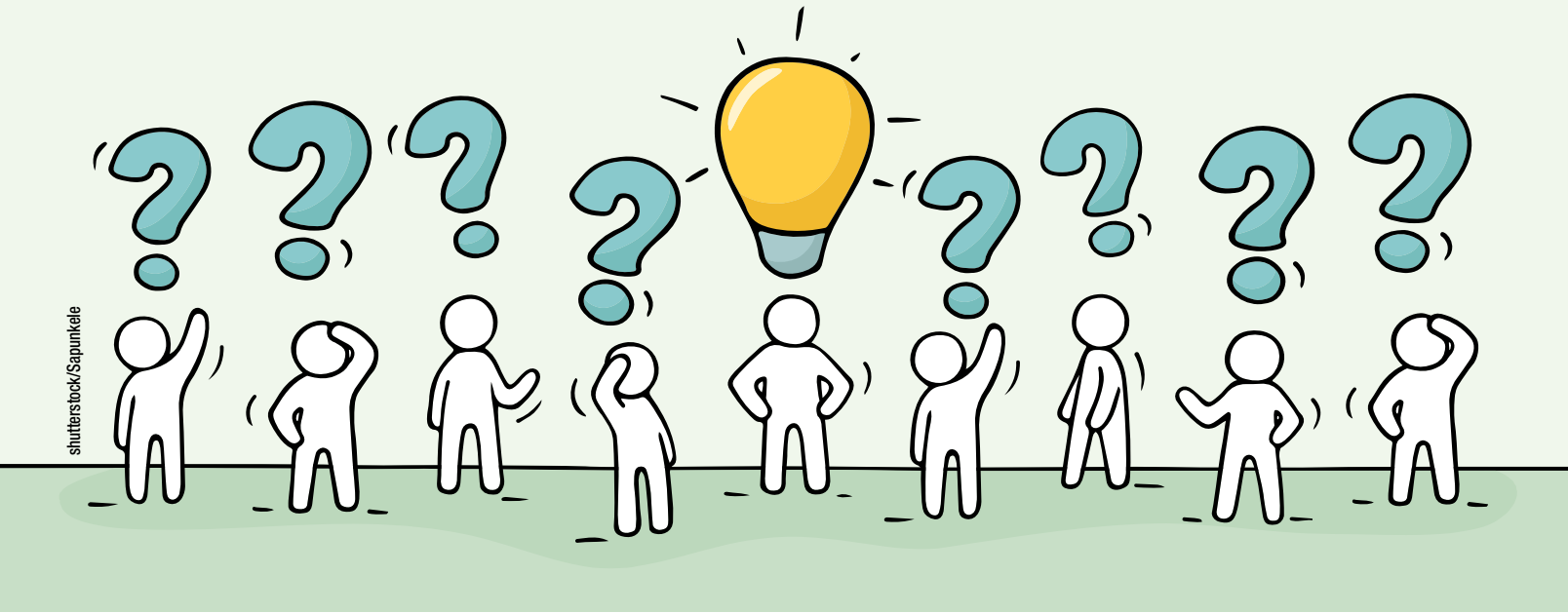
Mechanic, Mediator, Mentor: Interrogating Common Roles of Technical Editors

By BAILEY S. CUNDIFF | *STC Student Member*



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I COMPLETED a technical communication internship at a large technology company last year, for which my sole function was to write single-sourced help content for new software features. Technical communication teams operate agilely at this company, with an iterative internal review process. "Reviewing" is unofficial and lateral, a sort of checks-and-balances approach to internal validity. "Editing," the writers and managers told me, is built into writing, and it doesn't involve contextual or design considerations. It is just deciding what words go where.

A few months later, a fellow graduate student, who previously worked as a technical communicator and project manager, expressed a similar sentiment: "Editing," he said, "comes in after the real work has been done." When pressed, he insisted: editing isn't real work.

I, and many other editors I know, beg to differ. But the attitude that positions editing as somehow "less than" persists. Often, this attitude is the result of a writer's negative interactions with one or more editors, which ruin the profession and practice for that writer forever. These writers, too, become standards by which editors judge future writers. But this attitude toward editing does editors, writers, *and* users a major disservice.

Several trade books have attempted to address the writer-editor relationship, including Bonnie Hill's *The (Expanded) Freelancer's Rulebook: A Guide to Understanding, Working with, and Winning Over Editors.* These books contain rampant stereotypes of both writers and editors: "editors have no common human decency," authors are flighty and unreliable, and editors need to "attempt a show of authority" to gain a writer's trust.

In *Technical Editing: The Practical Guide for Editors and Writers*, Judith Tarutz provides case studies of common situations editors can expect to encounter. Case titles include "Writer Ignores Editor's Comments," "Writer Argues with Editor About Everything," "Editor's Changes Panic Writer," and "Editor Ruins Writer's Manuscript." These situations are likely familiar to anyone who has written or edited professionally. Clearly, there *is* more to editing than moving commas around.

We in technical communication have a systemic problem with how we talk about and practice editing—in industry and the academy, at entry and managerial levels.

Even job ads and job descriptions for editors leave out the nuances of editing. Skimming online job boards like *indeed.com* and *monster.com* provides many examples of brief, technically focused ads that make editing seem like a straightforward, impersonal endeavor. These ads define editing as setting standards, ensuring consistency of expression, and checking documents for accuracy. Editing is thus considered to exist in a sort of vacuum, as a mechanical process and skill.

It seems like a chicken-and-egg situation: which came first, the archetype of the aggressively nitpicky editor or that of the sensitive (or stubborn) writer? Regardless, we in technical communication have a systemic problem with how we talk about and practice editing—in industry and the academy, at entry and managerial levels.

In the workplace, editors and writers are often thrown together with little explanation of what their relationship is to be and how they should deal with one another. Giving feedback on and editing writing is sensitive business, and companies may do little to alleviate the pressure of those practices.

Let's return to the distinction between "reviewing" and "editing" that was so integral to my internship. Most review comments (not just those on a lowly intern's writing) took on a teaching, occasionally patronizing tone. If an editor is not a reviewer, is an editor a teacher? Something else? To answer this question, I scoured major style guides, journal articles, and books for aspiring writers and editors—the same materials that perpetuate portrayals of difficult writers and editors—for the ways editors' jobs are commonly positioned and understood.

In the 15 sources I read, I found these 13 roles: advisor, ally, consultant, diplomat, doctor, first reader, helpmeet, mechanic, mentor, negotiator, servant leader, teacher, and user advocate (see Figure 1). I have encountered many of these roles as an editor and writer, and I keep finding more in casual reading after the fact. The roles imply the kinds of interactions writers can expect to have with editors: thinking of an editor as a teacher, for example, positions writers as students and thus less knowledgeable and in need of instruction. And thinking of an editor as a diplomat can remove the onus of reconciliation and civility from the writer.

Figure 1. Common roles of editors

If writers and editors on a team have different ideas of what an editor is and should be, conflict results: we end up with writers who truly believe that editing is not real work.

Consider, too, that editors have unique responsibilities (see Figure 2). They are beholden to the writer of the content, the user of the content, and the company whose name is on the content—in addition to the rules of the language in which they write.

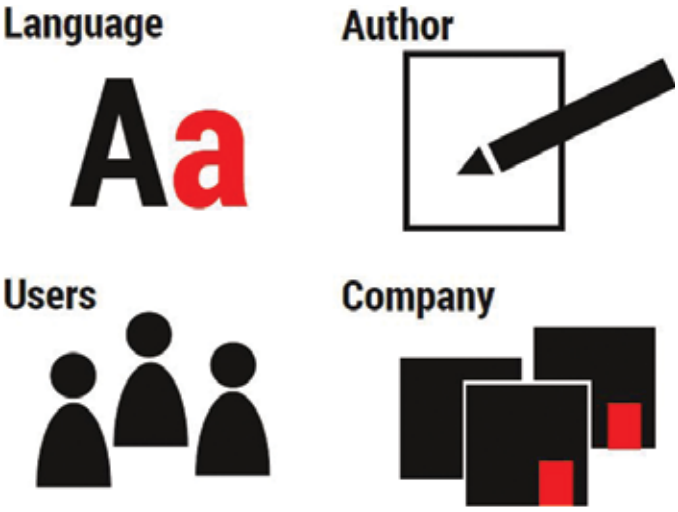

Figure 2. Responsibilities of editors

Technical communicators must, in other words, be attentive to how these responsibilities and the roles outlined above can form the basis of writer-editor interac-

tions. This working relationship has a direct effect on the quality of content users receive.

Rather than constantly fighting these roles (and one another), I propose a different approach. Perhaps it would be more productive to interrogate the assumptions and misunderstandings themselves—to determine how these kinds of metaphorical roles shape understandings of technical editing. Perhaps we should all take a step back and think about how we portray, enact, and train people in editing—how those of us who understand editing as a significant part of any writing process can dispel potentially dangerous misunderstandings about what editing is and does. It's more than quality assurance. It's more than "fixing." It's more than an annoyance that satisfies a certain few accuracy-obsessed individuals within a company or academic department.

So how might technical communicators advocate for editors in practice, whether you're a writer, editor, or manager?

1. Reconsider the roles in which editors are cast on your team.

Break down the roles in Figure 1 (and any others you have seen or experienced): consider how you and your team fill them in your daily work. (Susan Haire's article in the April 2017 issue of *Intercom* is a great example of this exercise, and I'm glad to see someone else engaging with the different roles technical communicators must take on.) Determine what stereotypes everyone might be bringing to the table—and how those stereotypes could undermine your editors' and writers' authority and effectiveness.

These conversations could take place in a panel, workshop, or roundtable setting, or editors could write short posts for internal communications networks. If writers see editors as mechanics, and editors see themselves as teachers, they should work together to remedy that mismatch. Also consider what benefits the roles might have for users, for the team: appreciate the unique skills editors bring.

2. Advocate for the users of your content by allowing editors to attend to all their responsibilities.

Encourage editors to work on behalf of users without having to worry about stepping on writers' toes or stepping outside predetermined roles. Integrate user experience testing with editing processes to learn how users prefer to access and read your content and where users could benefit from an extra level of consistency. Apply this new knowledge at every turn.

One way to connect editors to user advocacy is to provide access to user personas that outline typical user needs and behaviors. Update the personas regularly with the results of user testing, and build user advocacy into company style guides. Also consider training editors in accessible design principles to centralize the work of making content inclusive for all users. The overall goal should be to bring editors and writers together to improve working relationships and produce high-quality content.

3. Remember that editing is inherently relational and treat it as such.

Allow editors to represent a link to the user, not simply an authority on mechanics. Avoid the temptation to distill editing to hard skills like fixing grammar, formatting, and style. Attend to soft skills like negotiation, encouragement, and compromise. Consider providing training on relationship building for editors *and* writers. Further encourage the team to consider users as people, not as characteristics on paper. A common goal of meeting user needs can reduce friction and allow editors and writers to work more effectively, both independently and together.

4. Don't lose sight of the importance of editorial accuracy.

No matter the context, no matter the team, editors can serve as the last line of defense against careless mistakes and serious comprehension issues. In a 2014 blog post for *The Guardian*, freelance journalist Nell Frizzell offers her own list of roles that illustrates this point well:

> *An editor may be butcher, but they are also a midwife, a parent, a nanny, a matron, a therapist, a conspirator and a friend. But don't forget that, in the end, only a butcher can turn a live, stamping, snorting, animal into something you can stomach. So perhaps it's time we heard it for the butchers.*

Be critical of the roles editors appear to take on. Advocate for users through your editors. Develop productive working relationships. But even if your team isn't fully ready to consider editing a relational skill, let editors do what they do best.

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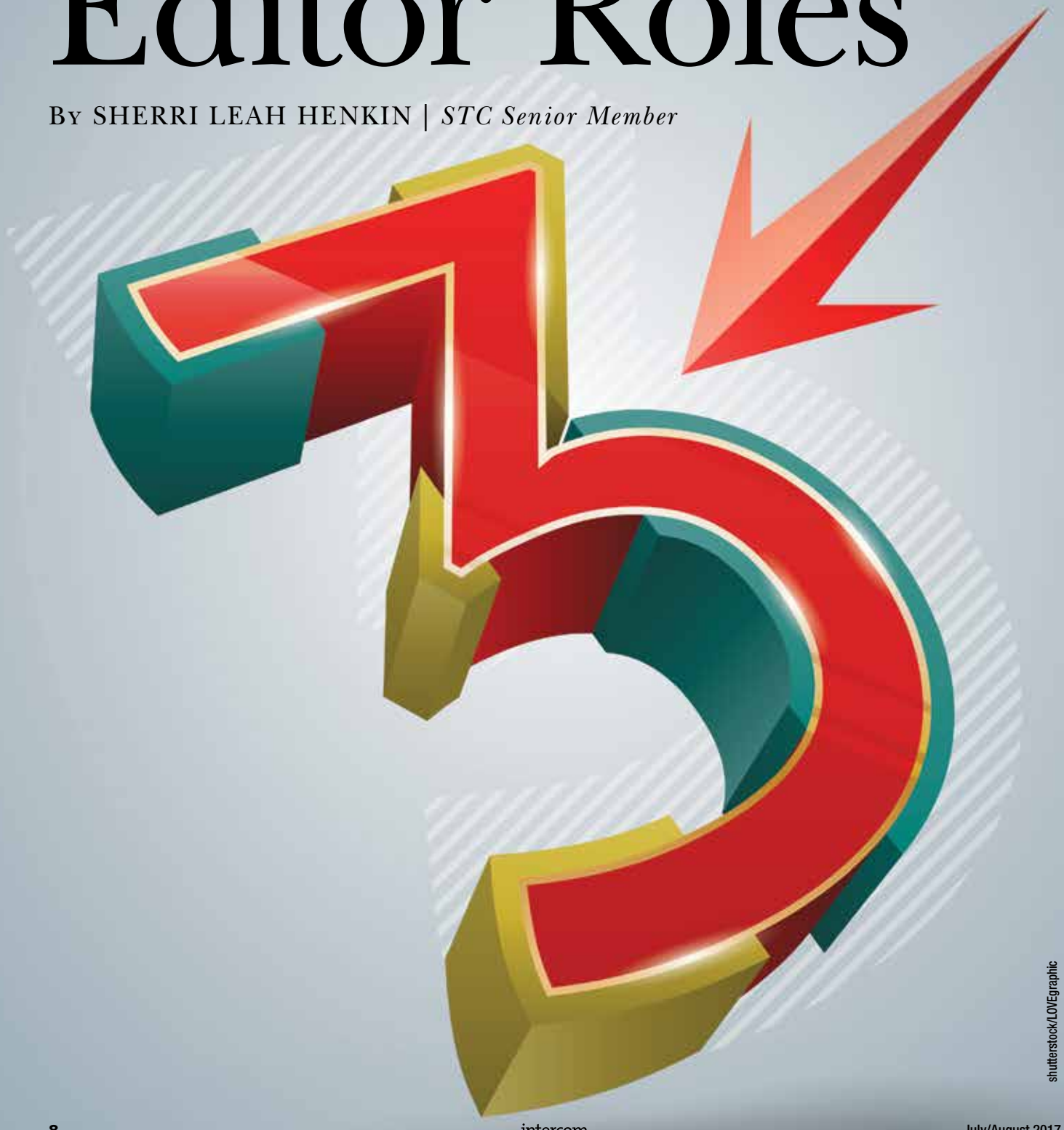
REFERENCE

Frizzell, Nell. "Beyond Cuts: The Many Roles of a Writer's Editor." *The Guardian*. 12 March 2014. Accessed 15 May 2017. *https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/mar/12/writers-editors-eleanor-catton-booker-winner.*

My Top Three Editor Roles

By SHERRI LEAH HENKIN | *STC Senior Member*



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In 2016, the STC Technical Editing SIG held a Watercooler Chat entitled, "Technical Editors Wear Many Hats." We discussed the evolving role of an editor and various roles technical editors play. Some common responsibilities emerged:

- proofreader
- trainer
- peer reviewer
- writer
- video creator

Not all editors wear these specific hats. I have some days where I focus on proofreading, for example. Generally, though, I juggle several editor roles during a given day. Here are my three favorites.

1. Peer Reviewer

What It Is

Peer reviews aren't formal editing. My colleague wants another professional writer to provide objective feedback that improves the piece. Sometimes, it's an early draft and my colleague wants another read to help her organize the piece. Other times, a fellow writer emails the story to me for one last review to make sure the piece flows. I critique stories, blog posts, articles, chapters, or online course material.

How I Do It

Colleagues ask if I have time to review their piece. I receive the document in Word or PDF. Since this is review, not a copyedit, I provide feedback in comments within the document. My review focuses on readability, format, and suggestions to correct minor grammar/punctuation issues.

There's a side benefit to these reviews: I read material before it's published!

Examples from the Trenches

Case 1: Tightening Up a Blog Post

I reviewed a short article about a personal medical experience that a colleague wrote for a nonprofit organization. The organization planned to publish the article on their website. I suggested removing details that detracted from the main point. I also guided the writer to switch from passive to active voice.

Case 2: Consistent Fonts and Format

A colleague sent me a chapter of a workbook in PDF. She had used five different fonts, multiple graphics, and several bullet point formats. The writer asked me to look at the format and activity instructions. I provided guidance about breaking out instructions into additional steps and ideas to clarify vague terms. I suggested that she select a maximum of two or three fonts, and standardize the bullet formats. Some of the graphics detracted from the instructions, and I suggested she remove those graphics.

Case 3: Compelling Cover Letter

Occasionally, a friend asks me to review a cover letter for a job application. I consider these peer review activities because the writer wants objective input to improve their letter. Recently, I reviewed a cover letter for a teaching position in adult education. The letter writer had the qualifications; the issue was formatting. I suggested she use headers, bulleted lists, and quote text from the job posting. My goal was to help her improve the readability and easily highlight how she matched the requirements. (She got the job!)

2. Proofreader

What It Is

Unlike peer reviews, as a proofreader, I'm brought into the project in its final stages. Proofreading goes beyond the spelling/grammar check tools. The manual proofreader catches errors that a tool may have missed. My goal is "to eliminate grammar problems, typos, spelling errors, and usage mistakes" (Johnson-Sheehan, 8). I may also check for factual errors and inconsistencies.

How I Do It

A client sends me a draft article in Word or PDF, or the website link. Occasionally, the client requests specific sections for me to proof or recurring errors they suspect are in the document. While I enter the edits into the document, I also keep a list of the recurring errors I find and provide that list in the cover email.

I use a style guide for reference. If the client has a preference, and/or a company guide, I use that. Otherwise, I'm a *Chicago Manual of Style* aficionado!

Examples from the Trenches

Case 1: Newly Launched Website

The task was to proof the client's initial blog posts; the client sent me the link to the live website. One post had this bold headline: **Heart Attach** [sic]. I quickly emailed a screenshot to the client before adding this error to my list. "Yikes! I proofread that title many times!" my client stated in her reply email. "It's supposed to say, 'Heart Attack.'" "Attach" is a good word but not the right word for this context. The client edited the headline while I continued to proof the other posts.

Case 2: Newsletter

While much of the information in this community hard-copy newsletter was culled from existing sources, with permission, this client needed proofreading before the newsletter went to print. I standardized the format. To check the facts in the source material, I researched some of the historical data and publication information. One story stated that an event happened in 2018; the event had occurred in 2008.

I had an additional language challenge with this project: Hebrew terms transliterated in English. The spelling of the transliterations was not consistent. I found recognized sources for spelling transliterations and edited terms.

3. UX (User Experience) Editor

What It Is

I originally hadn't thought of UX testing as editing. And maybe technically it's not. I consider it editing because I want to suggest a term or process that users are familiar with, making the user experience pleasant.

How I Do It

My client sends a link to either a live site or one ready for beta testing. Typically, the client outlines specific sections for me to test. I provide suggestions for edits/corrections/improvements from the consumer point of view. I don't address changes in the coding; I leave those changes to the developers.

Examples from the Trenches

Case 1: Missing Log-in/Log-out Buttons or Instructions

An educational institution asked me to log in, check the navigation links, and log out on a secure section of their website. After I clicked on the website link, I figured there would be a log-in button. I couldn't find it, or a link, or instructions to log in. I emailed Tech Support. Tech Support's response: "We don't have a log-in button. Here are the steps to log in to the website."

After logging in, navigating the website went smoothly … until I wanted to log out. There was no log-out icon or link. I figured maybe just closing the browser would automatically log me out. When I reopened the browser, I was still logged in. Back to Tech Support. "Where's the log-out icon?" I received this email: "Oh, we don't have one. I need to send you a special log-out link."

My feedback to the institution? It was difficult to log in and log out. Not being able to logout is a potential threat to the user's privacy and security. Add simple log-in/log-out buttons or icons. Tech Support appreciated my feedback:

Your feedback means so much. I have been working to get a button on the page for over a year, just so people know when they're logged in. My next step is to add a way for people to log out—I will be using your feedback to advocate for a log-out button. I completely agree, it's another step to ensure privacy and protection.

Case 2: Donating on an Unsecured Website

A nonprofit organization requested that I navigate through their site and try some features. We agreed that I would try and donate to test the automated responses and website security.

On the main page, there was no Donate icon. Why make a potential donor hunt through the site to give money? When I did find the donation page, I noticed that the website address wasn't secure.

My suggested changes? Secure the donation page. Consumers don't want to provide PII (Personally Identifiable Information) on an unsecured website. To make it easy to donate, add Donate icons on all pages.

Case 3: Live Website Passes UX Test But Fails Grammar and Spelling

Testing this live website went well; navigation was smooth and easy. The client asked me to give a cursory review to some of the text. However, in my cursory review of text, I noticed possessives when the word should have been in plural form and misspelled words.

I notified the client, and we agreed that I would read the text carefully. While this was initially user testing, we combined proofreading. After all, if the text has typos and grammar mistakes, that contributes to an unpleasant user experience and potential loss of business.

Editors wear many hats. The commonality is attention to detail. And I enjoy that! To paraphrase another proofreader colleague, I get to be the last eyes on the content. It's rewarding to help colleagues and clients produce readable, error-free content!

Note: This article expands the STC Technical Editing SIG's Corrigo *article posted in April 2017.*

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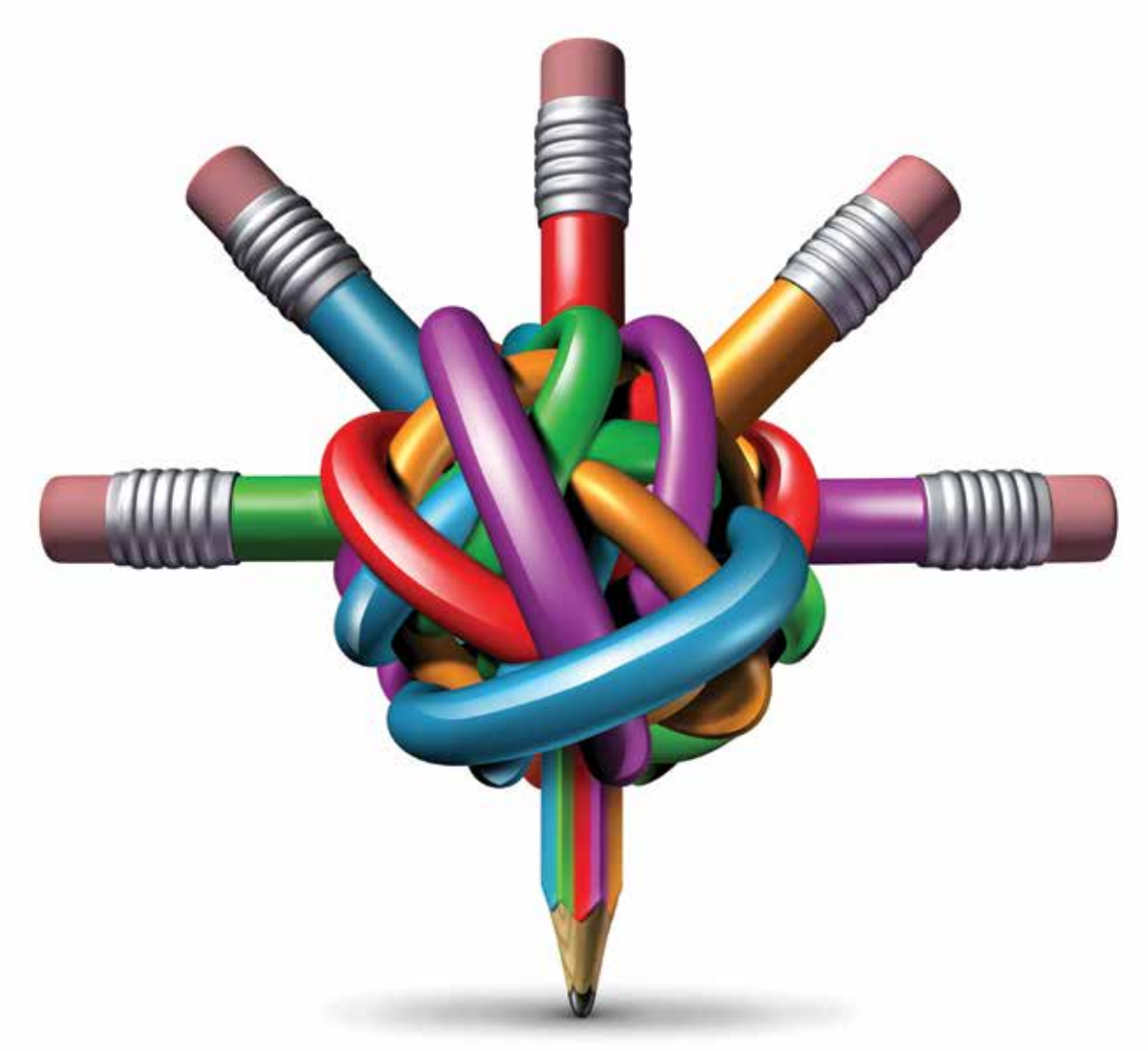
REFERENCE Johnson-Sheehan, Richard. *Technical Communication Today.* 5th ed. New York: Pearson, 2014.

How Complex Is Editing for Plain Language?

By JAMIE GILLENWATER | *STC Senior Member*



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PLAIN LANGUAGE ENSURES your audience can find, understand, and use written materials to meet their needs. To assess whether your document uses plain language, ask yourself these questions:

- Does the document focus on the audience, rather than myself or my organization?
- Is the main message first?
- Is the information clear and concise?
- Am I using active voice to clearly define the doer and the action?

Let's look at how to review your document for each of these concerns during your revision.

Audience

To focus on your audience, you must first understand your audience. Consider who they are, along with where and when they will be using your information. Ideally, the writer defined your audience before creating the document; revisit this reader profile before editing the document.

Once you know who your readers are, focus on their needs, not your own. Instead of asking, "What do I want to say?", ask "What does my audience need to know?" Review the organization and context of your document to focus on what your readers need.

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To communicate clearly with your audience, consider using pronouns throughout the document. When it is clear, you may use "we" to represent your company and "you" to refer directly to your reader. While editing your document, look for consistent use of these pronouns.

Emphasis

One of the easiest ways to serve your audience is to put your main message first. Help them know whether the information applies to them. Readers today sort through more written and visual information than ever before. Make sure you identify your purpose and the document contents early.

Today's readers are distracted. Use visual design to help your reader quickly navigate through the document and find the important information. Their eyes typically travel down the left side of their screen or page. Use left-aligned headings to define each main topic. Use charts and tables to emphasize important information and make it easier to understand.

Clear and Concise

It is easy to get too close to our documents. We often assume that the information is clear because we understand the topic. As time allows, take a day or two to step back from your document. Approach it with fresh eyes. Read the document out loud to make sure the text makes sense. Then you can apply changes where they make sense.

Conciseness is increasingly important. A distracted audience needs to be able to find details quickly and on the go. Use as few words as possible to explain your topic. As Albert Einstein said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." As you edit your document, consider whether the document contains all that your reader needs but nothing more.

One way to decrease wordiness is to remove or replace unnecessary phrasing. For example, replace "afford an opportunity" with "allow." Other wordy phrases include "in order to" and "close proximity." Replace these with "to" and "near." Instead of nominalizations, such as "give consideration to," use active verbs, like "consider."

Active Voice

Help your reader quickly identify who is responsible for each action. Review your document to ensure active voice is consistently used, even if it is an understood you. Some writers and subject matter experts believe passive voice is more formal, so it seems to be the better choice for business or technical writing. However, it can cause confusion as to who must complete each step of a process, which muddles technical agreements and company policies.

Additional Resources

Plain Language is a legal requirement for many state and federal agencies, along with certain industries. Federal and state governments have created many resources, such as the USDA Plain Language Reviewer's Checklist.

Audience	Who are the readers? What do the readers need to know?
Organization	Is the information presented logically? Is the purpose of this document clear for the reader? Does the most important information come first? Can the reader quickly and easily find what they are looking for? Are heading, subheadings, lists and tables used?
Words	Does the document use the terms "I," "we," and "you"? Are any unfamiliar terms and acronyms defined? Does the document avoid using jargon?
Sentences	Is the document written in active NOT passive voice? Does each sentence only have one idea? Does the document avoid using double negatives?
Paragraphs	Do paragraphs begin and end with transitions? Is the overall flow of the document cohesive?

Table 1. USDA Plain Language Reviewer's Checklist

Microsoft Word Options

Use Microsoft Word's spelling and grammar check to automate much of your plain language editing. Select File > Options > Proofing > Settings (beside Spelling & Grammar).

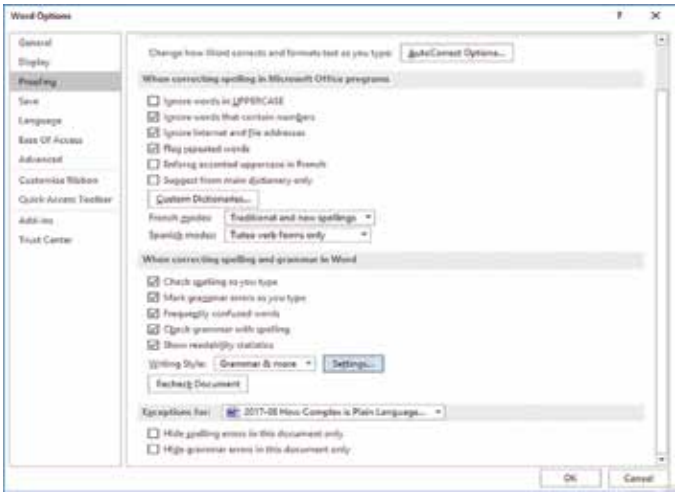


Figure 1. Microsoft Word's Proofing Feature

Within these settings, select plain language issues to search for and highlight with the Spelling & Grammar check. Most of these issues fall under the Clarity and Conciseness category, which includes passive voice, wordiness, jargon, and nominalizations.

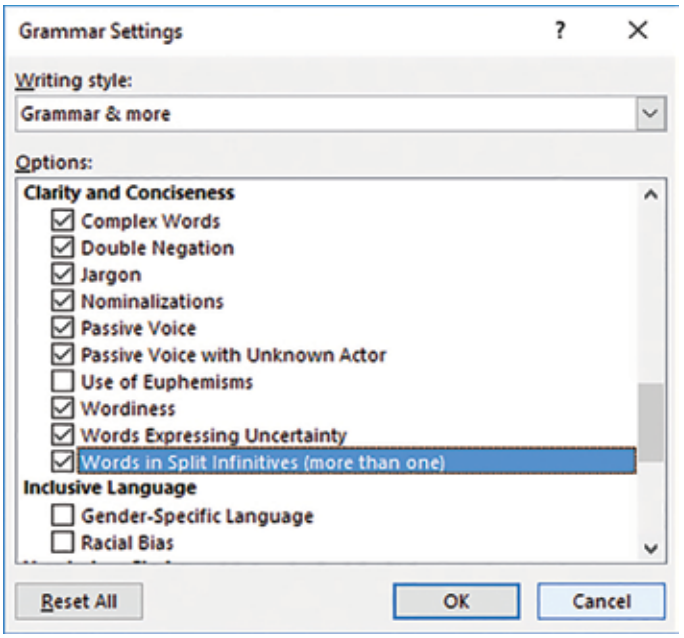


Figure 2. Microsoft Word's Grammar Settings

Creating Reader Profiles

If you don't have a reader profile for the document you are editing, refer to *Technical Communication Today* by Richard Johnson-Sheehan. He defines the four types of readers; explains how to assess their needs, values, and attitudes; and offers four types of context to consider for delivery.

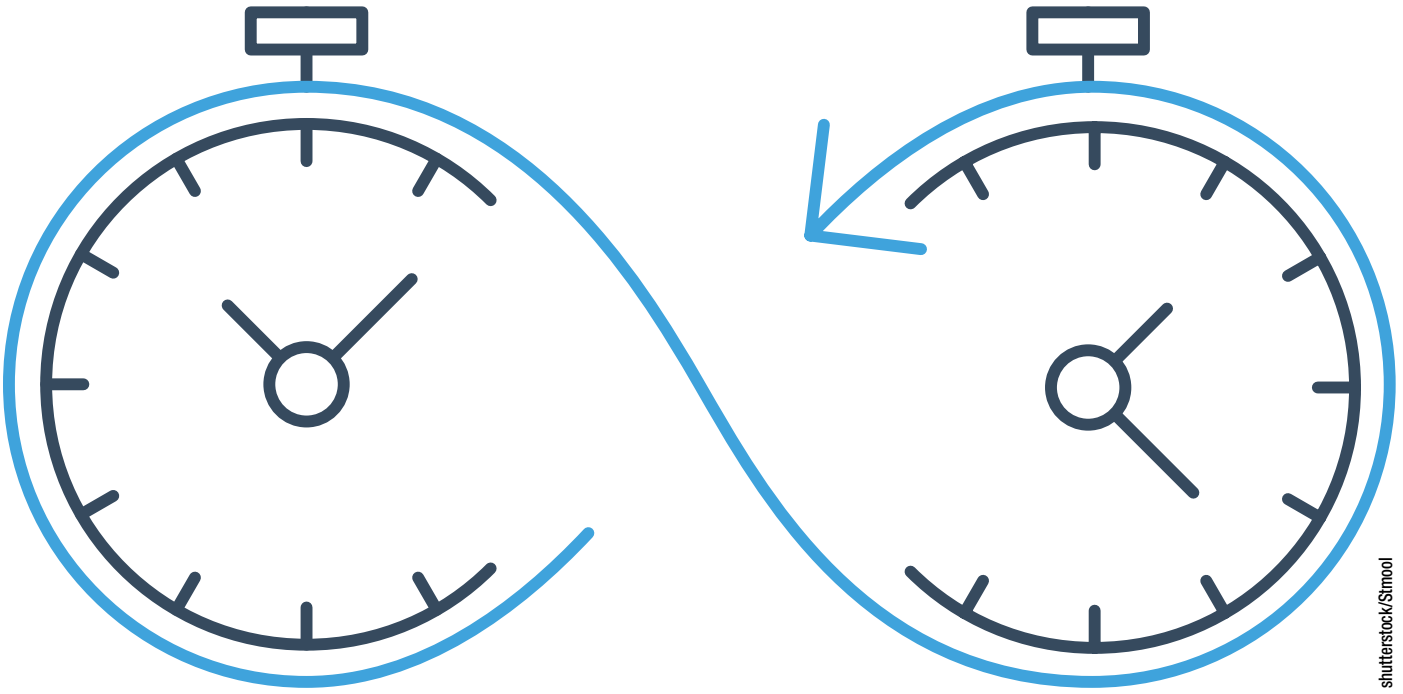
More Information

For more information about plain language, refer to the following sites:

- Plain Language—Improving Communication from the Federal Government to the Public: *http://www.plainlanguage.gov*
- USCIA Plain Language: *https://www.uscis.gov/plainlanguage*
- Center for Plain Language: *http://www.centerforplainlanguage.org*

With more than a decade of experience in the communications industry, JAMIE GILLENWATER, *is a skilled technical communicator. She is an independent consultant with clients in oil and gas, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, and real estate industries. She leads a variety of courses, including business writing for federal employees, training for the Certified Professional Technical Communicator certification exam, and Adobe InDesign courses. Jamie is a member of STC Carolina, the Consultant & Independent Contractor SIG, and the STC Nominating Committee.*

Investing Time to Save Time:



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THE SEQUEL

By GEOFF HART | *STC Fellow*

FOR MOST OF MY 30-YEAR CAREER, I've embraced opportunities to learn new communication skills. Broadening my repertoire made me an essential employee, while improving the diversity of my work and eliminating boredom. The downside? I had no free time. Indeed, my workload increased so much I never would have survived without learning to use my new skills more efficiently. But I've also learned how hard it was to motivate myself to learn those new efficiencies. In traveling the world to teach what I've learned, I've found most people feel the same way: we're often too "lazy" to invest time in learning new things, even when we know, logically, they'd subsequently save hours of effort.

One obstacle is the fear that saving time requires huge efforts, such as learning complex new software. But it turns out that the biggest savings come from small, simple things we do every day without noticing. Cumulatively, these add up to enormous time sinks when we perform those actions repeatedly. For many years, I'd evangelized how keyboard shortcuts were more efficient than the mouse or arrow keys. When challenged to prove my belief, a little data on how I work demonstrated that just three keyboard shortcuts for moving around a file saved me up to 20 minutes per day compared with using the mouse or arrow keys. Don't believe me? Check my article (Hart 2011) for details. I got so excited by this result—and by having 20 unexpected minutes to relax and work without feeling rushed—that I came up with many more shortcuts.

Of course, we do many things less frequently that take longer to accomplish. Working primarily as an editor, I need to repeatedly type the same comments, sometimes with only slight variations. That repetition both wastes time and increases wear and tear on my aging body. Anything that reduces typing lets me finish work earlier and decreases my pain at day's end. Paying attention to what I was typing let me develop automatic text shortcuts that eliminate prodigious amounts of typing.

In this article, I'll provide examples of just how easy it is to save time by investing time.

Moving Faster with Shortcuts

My first three movement shortcuts were simple ones: move to the previous or next word, the start or end of the sentence, and the previous or next punctuation (i.e., a mid-sentence position). You'll find that you use these constantly when you edit someone's work or revise your own. My article (Hart 2011) provides details of how to create such shortcuts. Chapter 5 of my onscreen editing book (Hart 2016) demonstrates more than a dozen *categories* of shortcut, each with many examples. The key to identifying such repetitions in your own work is to

The biggest savings come from small, simple things we do every day without noticing.

pay attention to things you do frequently. For example, I edit science manuscripts, so I frequently need to move to numbers, brackets, and literature citations so I can modify the text; thus, I've created shortcuts that bring me to the next or previous instance of these things in a single keystroke.

How? By recording a Word macro that uses the search and replace dialog box to find special characters. Jack Lyon's wonderful free primer "Advanced Find and Replace for Microsoft Word" (*www.editorium.com/ftp/AdvancedFind.zip*) teaches everything you need to know to master this dialog box. An updated version is available for purchase on Amazon (Lyon 2015). As an editor, I use this tool every time I need to do a consistency check, dozens of times per manuscript. With a friend's help, I saved even more time by creating a macro that copies selected text into the Find dialog box, finds the next or previous instance, and then closes the dialog box. I also need to check literature citations, potentially hundreds of times per manuscript. The Find macro, combined with a few other steps to automate the process, cuts the time required to check literature citations by more than 50%, and I make fewer errors. For details, see my article on the TechWhirl site (Hart 2017). This is just one example of a broader principle: making your software support the way you want to work instead of changing how you work to suit the software.

Reducing the Amount of Typing

Writers and editors both type a lot, and in technical communication, this involves much repetition. For editors, the repetition involves standard comments; I have a list of more than 100 that I use in most manuscripts, often several times. I use Word's AutoCorrect feature, which replaces a shortcut (an easily remembered abbreviation) with text; my shortcuts are typically 5 keystrokes long, and create from 20 to more than 200 characters of comment text. If I can save 15 keystrokes this way, 100 times per manuscript, that's 1500 characters I don't need to type! If you document software for a living, you could create such shortcuts for every menu item you describe repeatedly. For example, "] comm" (5 keystrokes) could type "Open the Insert menu and select Comment." (40 keystrokes)—a saving of 35 keystrokes. One of my students at the United Nations uses this approach to write highly standardized 12-page reports

in minutes using dozens of AutoCorrects. Word's Building Blocks feature allows longer, more complex chunks of text, such as standard table formats. If you use a content management system, it offers even more power for creating text once and reusing it many times.

Better still, why not build guidance and standardization into document templates for different jobs? I call these templates "dynamic style guides" (Hart 2000) because they turn your word processor into a performance-support system. For writers, they eliminate the need to remember a document's structure and content or retype boilerplate that appears in every document; for editors, this nearly eliminates the need to ask authors to insert missing information (the template reminds authors to provide the information) and eliminates the need to edit the boilerplate; it's already been inserted and proofread. Again, content management systems can perform much of the heavy lifting for you.

Finding Motivation

These ideas seem simple enough, yet if you're like me, you probably work harder finding excuses to *not* invest the time than you do finding solutions. Like me, you could make your life easier if you'd just get over your reluctance and persuade yourself to try. Start by identifying what's stopping you and solve that problem. *My* problem combines software fatigue (frustration with endless, often counterproductive, generally pointless changes to how software works) with stress over having to memorize yet another shortcut. And I'm the guy trying to persuade *you* to invest some time!

Some tips I've described for fighting writer's block (Hart 2012) may get you past your reluctance. For example, eliminate distractions. Instead of searching the Web for yet another LOLcat image, create a new AutoCorrect and reward yourself with that LOLcat using the time you save. If the problem is burnout, give yourself some downtime. I keep an ideas file, and when the burnout starts to ease, I return to that file to see which ideas I can implement most productively. If the problem is fear, learn to be willing to fail—and to seek help from others. Many of my best solutions arose from brainstorming problems with colleagues. In my case, I solve software fatigue and stress by forgiving myself for delaying, and then coaxing myself to invest the time. Writing an article such as this one provides additional incentive: I feel hypocritical providing advice that I'm not willing to follow myself.

Eliminating problems, or finding ways to cope with them, lets you seek ways to motivate yourself. Everyone has different motivations. Here are some of my rewards that might motivate you, too:

- Calculate the return on your investment to satisfy your inner numbers geek (Hart 2011).
- Save time at work, finish earlier, and go do something more fun (e.g., a late-day kayak excursion).
- Reduce the number of keystrokes to reduce your aging body's pain and fatigue.
- Automate or accelerate routine mechanical tasks to free up time to concentrate on the real work (clear communication), which is the part most of us like best.
- Improve your work quality. As a wage slave, this earned me better performance appraisals; as a freelancer, it creates intense client loyalty.
- Master your tools, like any other professional. I take quiet satisfaction at being as fast as I am.

What could motivate *you* to invest some time in saving time?

GEOFF HART *has been seeking ways to avoid being more productive at work for nearly 30 years. Despite this, he's been working with scientist authors from around the world to publish their research in peer-reviewed science journals, with increasing efficiency, during those 30 years. Visit him online at* www.geoff-hart.com.

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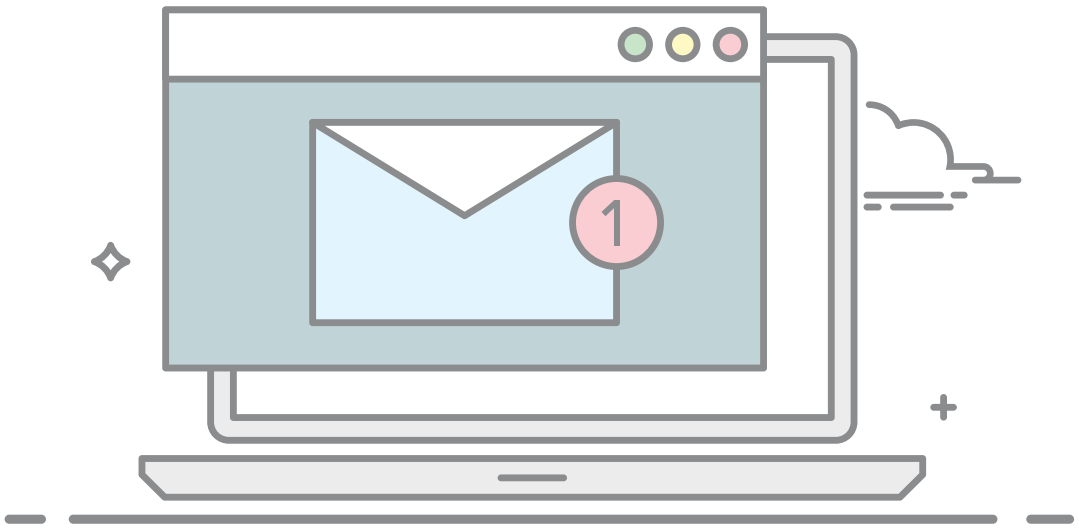
Your Email Doesn't Deserve the Junk Folder: How to Write a Subject Line that Will Inbox



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By DANIELLE L. KARR

DIGITAL MARKETING CAN BE a vast and mysterious world, and technical communicators, when thrown into that world, often find themselves uncertain of how to best approach the different digital mediums. Writers may be excellent editors and masters in their fields, but when they have to take that expertise online they find themselves in unfamiliar territory and resort to tactics that may or may not work well digitally. I often coach other writers in our company about the importance of writing short, clear copy for digital use. A particular issue I see writers face when writing for emails is that they do not know about the copy restrictions for sending an email from a database marketing platform. In fact, I just recently had a brand manager email me a subject line from another writer in the company because she was worried the subject line may trigger a spam filter. The purpose of the email was to let customers know that if they visited our booth at a trade show they could be entered to win a $100 gift card. The subject line in question was, "Discover smart technology for your chance to win $100!" The brand manager's instinct was right: it was very likely going to trigger a spam filter, but with a few small tweaks, it could easily inbox. If writers want to hone their digital expertise, being aware of the unique strategies in digital writing often requires is the first step in building greater success with online communications.

The Art of Inboxing

Before we get into how to make the best subject line for inboxing and what was wrong with the above subject line, let me first define a couple terms. "Subject line" is the first line of copy a reader sees when they get an email in their inbox; it is the short text that entices them to open the email and read more. Basic subject line strategies include keeping the subject line short (50 characters or less), making the subject line intriguing, and personalizing it if possible. "Inboxing" occurs when an email successfully reaches the recipient's email inbox, passing through all the email client's filters. All email clients (from Gmail to Outlook) have spam filters that scan each incoming email to determine whether they inbox or go to junk/spam. An email is delivered to an inbox if the filter determines the email has a quality subject line, good email content, and a high sender reputation. Sender reputation is defined by things such as the quality of the email address list, how often recipients flag the emails as junk, and the bounce rate (the percentage of undeliverable email addresses in the recipient list). While the sender reputation is something that writers do not have much control over, email content and subject line is something they definitely *do* have control over. So, whether a writer is trying to create a company newsletter or send out a promotional email, knowing the following about subject lines will help the email stand a better chance at reaching its recipients.

Word Choice Matters

The best way a writer can create content that will not go straight to the junk/spam folder is to have a general knowledge of what spam filters look for in regard to spam-y content. There are endless lists online of the 100+ spam-trigger words, but some of the top words I see used by writers who are, in fact, *not* writing spam include the words *chance, win, $, giveaway, clearance, free, limited time*, and dozens of other words and phrases similar to those. Often companies will offer an incentive to fill out a survey, check out their new store or booth, or take advantage of a discount, and most writers will want to put that incentive in the subject line to lead with the most exciting content. However, that is where writers who are not aware of spam triggers get hung up—they write subject lines like the one I mentioned above, and the email never makes it into the inbox. Taking another look at that proposed subject line above with spam triggers in mind reveals that "chance," "win," and "$" are all in the subject line, making the risk of it not inboxing high. The more spam-trigger words a subject line has the higher the odds of the email being stopped, and even one spam-trigger word in a subject line has the potential to stop an email depending on the body content, so it is important to always try to keep those words to a minimum—especially in the subject line. For example, we sent a series of emails to our employees through our Salesforce platform for a company fundraiser and had two different email subject lines—one with a spam trigger in it and one without. "Help us donate $10,000 to Autism Speaks!" had a low open rate (30.72%) for an internal email, and we realized that it was because the email had been sorted to the junk folder by several of the email clients. We sent out another email in the same campaign with the subject line: "A great reason to get away from your desk!" and saw that it inboxed without a problem and had a more usual open rate for an internal email (58.3%). Note that normal open rates can vary depending on the audience, email type, industry, and several other factors. Most companies know their average open rates for emails, so when it suddenly dips, writers should look to see if a spam trigger is the culprit.

Say It Without Saying It

Writing an interesting subject line and quality email is only part of the equation when it comes to digital writing; knowing how content is going to be processed online gives a writer power to create something that will actually make it to the audience. Writers can get creative and work around these digital limitations to craft a subject line that will pass through the spam filters and inbox. For the email subject line mentioned at the beginning of this article, I ended up trading out "Discover smart technology for your chance to win $100!" for "<Recipient name>, this gift card could be yours!" and it inboxed without a problem. The second subject line dodges the tricky spam words while still leading with the main incentive, and proves that a clever subject line can get the point of the email across without running the risk of not inboxing. While a lot of subject line writing is a trial-and-error process, knowing these guidelines on how to write a successful subject line and avoid spam filters will put any digital writer ahead of the game.

DANIELLE KARR *was born in California, grew up in Oregon, and put down roots in Utah. She graduated with a Bachelor's in communications and a minor in English, interned in New York, and recently received a Master's in technical communication from Utah State University while working full time as a senior copywriter at one of the largest smart home companies in the nation. She has worked as a copywriter, advertising consultant, and editor for the past several years, and she has written for a wide variety of clients. When she's not writing, Danielle enjoys spending time with family and paddle boarding with her husband and two dogs.*

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Maintain Your Wiki Garden: A Cost-Free Method for Archiving Wiki Pages in Confluence

By RICHARD RABIL JR. | *STC Member*

I WORK AT A COMPANY that loves wiki technology a little too much.

I realize that sounds strange. Isn't having an active wiki user base a *good* problem to have?

Certainly, it's wonderful that so many people in our company embrace our instance of Atlassian Confluence. Our users actively create and collaborate on pages, contribute valuable knowledge, read the structured guides we wrote, post comments, and answer each other's questions.

At the same time, our wiki has grown so large that it has been called the Tower of Babel. There are thousands of pages, and if you don't know exactly what terms to use, running a search quickly feels overwhelming. Many pages are redundant or outdated (often both), leading to diluted search results. Not only does this cause our users frustration, it also prompts them to start new silos of information, which of course only compounds the problem.

The primary way we addressed this problem was by defining a method for page archiving. Below, I review the challenges associated with page archiving, followed by the automated solutions we explored. I then focus on how you can implement a reliable archiving method using Confluence's out-of-the-box functionality—a method that won't require you to invest money in any third-party plugins. Note that I use terms and concepts (such as "spaces," "macros," and "plugins") that assume a foundational understanding of the features of Confluence.

Challenges with Archiving

It seems that archiving pages in Confluence should be simple. Why can't you just query a space, find all the old pages, and either delete them in bulk or move them to another space that no one uses?

Confluence does provide some easy solutions for this. For example, you can create and designate an archive space, and generate lists of wiki pages and sort them by timestamp. But, as I discuss below, these solutions only go so far in helping you identify exactly which pages can be archived. The fact is that some wiki pages are very old, yet still receive frequent pageviews.

Our wiki has grown so large that it has been called the Tower of Babel. There are thousands of pages, and if you don't know exactly what terms to use, running a search quickly feels overwhelming, if not impossible.

The other challenge is time. Assessing the quality of a wiki page is laborious and subjective. Arguably the best person for the job is the page author, but what if that person has left the company? Even if the author is still around, he or she may have created hundreds of pages. And few people have the time and patience to go back through that much information to determine what to deprecate and what to keep.

Automated Methods: Pros and Cons

Ideally, you could automatically archive old wiki pages based on a combination of factors such as a page's age (when it was last updated) and relevance (how often it has been viewed). The best solution that my team found for this is a third-party tool called the Archiving Plugin for Confluence. Developed by Midori Global Consulting, this plugin provides a range of benefits, a few which include:

- Running reports that show you the quality of wiki pages in any given space. Quality is determined through a combination of the page's age and how often it has been viewed within a configurable date range.
- Sending bulk email notifications to authors whose pages have "expired" in terms of quality. This gives the authors a chance to update, delete, or archive the page.
- Bulk archiving pages based on configurable criteria and sending automatic email notifications to the authors in case they need to restore the pages.

However, the plugin is fairly costly. For a company of 500 or more users, a license will cost you about $3,000 a year. Moreover, there is a learning curve and an opportunity cost: you could end up spending substantial time as an administrator of the plugin and lose your focus on other valuable writing tasks.

I would argue that the return on investment well exceeds these factors, but if your company is anything like mine, approvals for third-party software takes time, and the budget is tight. In fact, your company may already be paying for multiple third-party plugins, making it all the more difficult to decide which ones justify the investment.

A Reliable Manual Method

The good news is that you can still develop a reliable manual method for archiving wiki pages that doesn't cost you extra money. What I describe below is certainly not a perfect solution, but it is systematic and intuitive, and my team has implemented it with great success.

Step 1: Create an archive space and update the global space header.

In Confluence, you can easily create a special archive space and move outdated pages into it. This is done by going

into the space settings and changing the space's status to **Archived**. The effect of this change is that any pages within the space no longer appear in the search results and activity feeds. This reduces the noise in the wiki while still giving you the ability to reference or restore the archived pages if necessary.

Additionally, you can display a prominent message in the global header of the space to cue readers about the space's purpose. For example, the header could say: *This is an archived page. The content is outdated and should not be trusted.* This too can be added in the space's settings. You can even style the message using standard wiki markup so that it displays more effectively. For guidance on this step (and the one before it), consult the Confluence online help.

Step 2: Create a single level of subdirectories within the archive.

After creating an archive space, you may find that it soon becomes filled with thousands of pages in no particular order. In our case, the archive space got so large that there was a major performance lag whenever someone tried to visit the space. A related problem emerged whenever a user needed to return to the space and restore a page, but couldn't remember the page's name. That meant we had to browse for it, which was all the more difficult due to the performance issue and the haphazard page structure.

To alleviate these difficulties, I recommend creating a single set of subdirectories within the space based on the major organizations in your company. When my team did this, the result was an alphabetically sorted list of sub-archives that looked like the following:

- Archive Home
  - Analytics Archive
  - Client Success Archive
  - Engineering Archive
  - Human Resources Archive
  - Marketing Archive
  - Product Management Archive
  - Regulatory Archive
  - Sales Archive

With this structure in place, users could move an archived page into more meaningful subsection and have a somewhat easier time restoring it if they needed to. For example, if you worked on the human resources team, you would move your wiki page under the *HR Archive* subdirectory, and could start by looking there if you ever needed to resurrect it.

If you go this route, make sure you commit to it. We allowed users to create whatever structure they wanted under the second layer, but we required the first layer to remain intact and had to monitor it to keep it clean. We did not create any additional layers, knowing that too much structure would complicate matters.

> The primary way we addressed this problem was by defining a method for page archiving. … [T]hen focus on how you can implement a reliable archiving method using Confluence's out-of-the-box functionality.

Again, this is not a perfect solution, but arguably it's better than nothing if your archive space expands so much that it starts having performance issues. And it's prudent to consider building this layer ahead of time, since organizing pages ad hoc is time-consuming and error prone.

Step 3: Identify pages to archive.

One of the more complicated aspects of the archiving process is identifying exactly which pages can be archived. In some cases, it's easy. You will be familiar with your own pages, or the pages created by your teammates, and will thus have a good sense of what can be removed. But inevitably you will come across many other pages of dubious quality. You will also feel the urge to archive sets of outdated pages in bulk. What can you do in these cases?

Share the page with the page author. If you're uncertain as to a page's relevance, share it with the page author and ask if it can be archived. If the author is not around, ask someone on his or her team. You might be surprised at how quickly they respond.

Use Confluence's content macros. You can use the Content by Labels and Content Report Table macros (both come packaged with Confluence) to generate page lists and sort them by their last updated date. The downside of these macros is that they require users to have meticulously labeled their pages, which is by no means a guarantee. Moreover, neither of these macros offer insight into how often the pages are viewed.

If neither of these methods get you anywhere, you'll have to use your judgment. But remember that you're not deleting the page, so even if you make a hasty or inaccurate judgment, you can still restore the page if necessary.

Step 4: Prepare your wiki pages for archiving.

Not all wiki pages are created equal. By that I mean you can't always move a page to the archive space without some unintended consequences, the chief one being that you will break any incoming links. The links will still work, but they

Once you have developed your process, share it regularly with users in your organization and include it in any relevant trainings.

will be misleading because they will direct users to pages that have been deemed no longer relevant or useful.

Fortunately, Confluence makes it easy to identify incoming links. This information is shown in the Page Information menu of an individual page. You can then follow each incoming link and edit the source page to redirect or remove the link. This is a time-consuming step, but an important one—especially if the page you're archiving has been replaced with a new one that you want people to use.

Step 4: Move the page to the archive space and (optionally) document your decision in the page itself.

After all incoming links have been deleted or redirected, you can safely move the page to the relevant subdirectory in the archive space. By default, any child pages will be moved along with the parent page, but you have the option to keep the child pages behind if you like.

But what if multiple people are watching the page, and they don't understand why the page has been archived? This could be a problem if the page is frequently used (a relatively common scenario in our company).

In such cases, consider adding a note at the top of the page to explain your rationale. To facilitate this step, my team created boilerplate explanations to cover the most common archiving scenarios, and encouraged users to modify the explanations as needed. Of course, this is another manual step, so unless the page is high-profile, consider it optional.

Archive Scenario	Boilerplate Explanation
Page was outdated and irrelevant	This page was archived because it was deemed outdated or irrelevant. See <TICKET NUMBER> for background information.
Page contents were combined with another page	This page was archived because its contents were merged into another page: <PAGE NAME>. See <TICKET NUMBER> for background information.
Page was replaced	This page was archived because it was replaced by a new page: <PAGE NAME>. See <TICKET NUMBER> for background information.

Figure 1. Boilerplate explanations for common archiving scenarios.

Step 5: Write instructions for the process and evangelize it.

The final step is to create a user-friendly set of instructions on how to execute the page archiving process and then publish it in a prominent place on the wiki. Here are the subtasks that I recommend you include in the page:

- Identify pages to archive
- Prepare the pages for archiving
- Move the pages to the archive space
- Document your rationale (optional)
- Restore an archived page
- Create a new archive subdirectory

Conclusion

It is true that the above method of page archiving relies on end users to proactively identify and move pages from one space to another. A more automated approach would be preferable (especially one that determines page quality based on age and page views). Still, Confluence equips you with valuable tools to move you toward a reliable, albeit non-automated solution.

Once you have developed your process, share it regularly with users in your organization and include it in any relevant trainings. Archiving pages should be something that anyone in the organization can do. If your wiki is large and active, and you're limited to out-of-the-box features, then getting as many people educated as possible is your best long-term strategy. Indeed, that kind of collaborative crowdsourcing is what wiki gardening is all about.

RICHARD RABIL JR. *is a principal technical writer at Oracle. He has over 10 years of technical communication experience and holds a master's degree in technical communication and rhetoric from Texas Tech University. You can follow him on Twitter at* @rrabil *or check out his blog at* richard.rabil.com.

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Reminder: Associate Fellow and Fellow Applications Due 1 November

EACH YEAR, STC RECOGNIZES leaders of our profession with the Associate Fellow and Fellow honors. An STC Associate Fellow is a Senior Member who has attained distinction in the field of technical communication and has been active in the field for at least 15 years. Fellow is an honor bestowed on Associate Fellows who have continued to make exemplary contributions to our profession and our organization. The contributions of Associate Fellows and Fellows involve significant achievements that advance the profession and its recognition.

Near the end of each year, STC Fellow and Associate Fellow committees consider the qualifications, contributions, and achievements of members who submit their credentials to the committees for review. The committees then provide recommendations to STC's Board of Directors. Fellows and Associate Fellows are recognized at the STC Summit following the approval of the Board.

This year, the STC Fellow and Associate Fellow committees are updating the application forms and adding examples and guidance to help improve the application process.

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We expect the new application forms to be posted and available online by 1 September 2017. To make sure candidates have the time they need to apply, the deadline to submit applications will be 1 November 2017. We look forward to recognizing the established leaders among us. If you have questions, please contact Associate Fellow Committee Chair Nicky Bleiel (*nbleiel@gmail.com*), Fellow Committee Chair Paul Mueller (*paul.mueller@pobox.com*), or STC staff liaison Elaine Gilliam (*elaine.gilliam@stc.org*).

Meet the August 2017 *Technical Communication* Cover Artist

ED REMPFER has been in the creative industry since 2003 and loves every aspect of it. Currently, he is a multimedia content developer at SofterWare, Inc., a company that develops software for nonprofits, childcare, camps, schools, and payment processing clients. According to Ed, "The best thing about my job is that I get to work on a variety of projects, from animations to websites to graphic design. They are always encouraging me to try new approaches and messaging creatively, so designing a cover illustration presented an exciting challenge for me." The President and Co-Founder of SofterWare, Dr. Nathan Relles, brought the opportunity of designing the cover of Technical Communication to Ed's attention and mentored him throughout the creative process.

As Ed explains:

My design aesthetic tends to be very clean and simple. So for the August issue I didn't start with a specific concept in mind, but I knew I wanted to use icons that represented communication from all different periods of time. I started designing in Adobe Illustrator, playing around with the layout, and quickly realized blocking them out in rows and columns was best. In my designs I always think of how I want my audience's eye to move around the piece. My goal was to have the reader's eye start in the middle of the cover and work their way out. I did that with blurring and coloring in Adobe Photoshop. Here I was able to create more interest by adding some 'depth of field' to the piece. I wanted to have it appear as though the reader was looking down on a pyramid of blocks. So I used several filters and played with the saturation of each layer to come up with the final piece.

As a bonus, Nathan suggested I animate the piece in Adobe After Effects to make it come alive, and to offer a novel and fitting dimension for the cover of a publication concerned with communication and technology. The whole process took me about a week to complete. Please see https://youtu.be/ugytCVNXbFs.

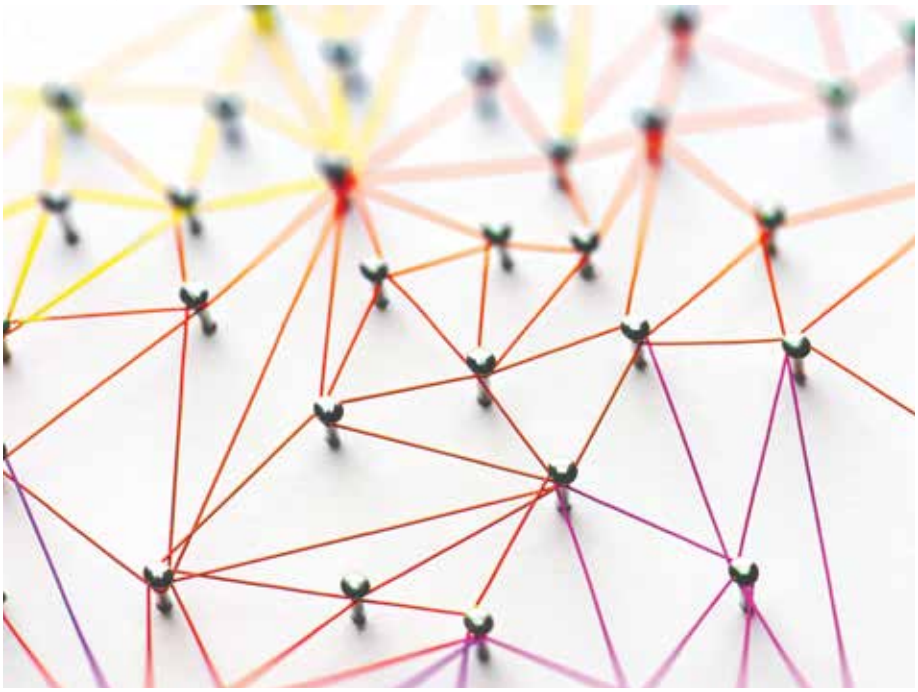
Outside of work, Ed likes to indulge in other creative hobbies like singing, playing the piano, and playing videos games, as well as spending quiet evenings at home with his husband.

Interested in submiting a cover design to *Technical Communication*? Visit *https://www.stc.org/techcomm/propose-a-cover-illustration/* or email *tceditor@stc.org*.

Share Yourself with *Intercom* Readers

WE'RE LOOKING FOR MEMBERS to contribute a first-person column for a future issue of *Intercom*. The magazine has a trio of member-focused columns: My Job (your day-to-day work), Off Hours (discussing your hobby or side gig), and Looking Back. My Job takes a look at the day-to-day work of an STC member and what makes the job interesting, fun, or unique. Off Hours is a look at the side jobs and hobbies our members have. And Looking Back focuses on senior members providing perspective earned throughout their career. Would you like to share your story with *Intercom* readers? Email James Cameron, *james.cameron@stc.org*, for more information, samples, and to volunteer!

Information 4.0: Why We Don't Do Standards



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BY RAY GALLON | *STC Senior Member*

OVER THE LAST YEAR, I have been working with colleagues to create a new entity called the Information 4.0 Consortium. You can find out what it's about at *www.information4zero.org*, but in this column, I'm going to write about one thing that it's not: a standards organization.

Anyone who has read this column or talked with me about the subject will know that I favor STC's participation in standards development. But it's important to remember that standards can never be a goal. Standards are something we develop when a need arises, to help us reach goals.

The Information 4.0 Consortium is concerned with ensuring that the developments grouped under the term, "Industry 4.0," include information at the center of product conception and design, and that the humanistic aspects of accountability, responsibility, and reliability of information be taken into account from the start. When information is passed between connected objects, in codes that humans are incapable of reading, we need some way to maintain traceability. If we give machines the capacity to make autonomous decisions, then we need a record of who (or what) made a given decision and what that decision was, that we can search for and retrieve in human readable form, even decades later. Questions of interoperability and data conversion are bound to become important as these technologies advance.

So why wouldn't a consortium like ours want to create standards? First of all, we're not experts in it. But even more importantly, it makes no sense to create standards in a vacuum. Unless major industry players recognize a need to develop such standards, such efforts will be a wasted investment, and very probably not adapted to situations as they evolve.

For Information 4.0 we have two examples where standards are being developed in an organic fashion.

TEKOM, the European technical communication association, has been coordinating an effort to develop what is called iiRDS—the International Standard for Intelligent Information Request and Delivery. This standard arose in response to a need on the part of different CCMS vendors to exchange published documents among different, proprietary platforms. The standard defines metadata for requests, and packet formats for delivery. It is still in early phases of development, and developers can get a preview of it at *https://iirds.tekom.de*.

This standard speaks to a need that Information 4.0 will certainly have, though in its present format, it is probably too limited, so the Consortium hopes to participate in and contribute to its development as friends of the initiative, to help enlarge its scope.

In other news, a recent communication from the OASIS open standards body announced two new specifications by the members of the Biometric Services Technical Committee. One

Standard Deviation is a column all about standards—a subject that affects most of our lives, but that we seldom think about. As the title implies, I want to keep the conversation lively and engaging. I'm always looking for guest columnists, and we welcome feedback with comments or requests for standards-related topics to cover. Email me at *rgallon4stc@culturecom.net*.

is a standard for Web Services using biometric devices. The other is a SOAP profile for Biometric Identity Assurance Services (BIAS) that "specifies the design concepts and architecture, data model and data dictionary, message structure and rules, and error handling necessary to invoke SOAP-based services that implement BIAS operations." The announcement goes on to say that these standards

> *…provide an open framework for deploying and remotely invoking biometric-based identity assurance capabilities that can be readily accessed across an SOA infrastructure.*

The emergence of web services as a common communications bus has profound implications for biometric services. The next generation will not only need to be intelligent, secure, tamper-proof, and spoof resistant, they will also need to be interoperable.

WS-Biometric Devices is a protocol designed to advance this goal, with a specific focus on the single process shared by all biometric systems.

Here again, a standard is developed and published by a recognized standards organization—one that publishes all its products as open source—in response to a perceived need.

Both these initiatives respond to requirements for Industry 4.0 technologies by creating services and protocols that can be shared among competitors to ensure interoperability (a pre-requisite for Industry 4.0) and security.

Put another way, people understood that they needed a standard, and got together to make one in order to meet their needs. This is a long way from deciding to create standards when no one has yet identified what they need them for or who will use them. Information 4.0 is committed to transparency and interoperability. The Consortium believes we will need standards to reach those goals—but what those standards might be, it is way too early to tell. When the need for them arises, we will seek to work with organizations like OASIS, STC, and TEKOM to see that they get developed in ways that will ensure their widespread dissemination and acceptance. ■

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F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 23-26 July
The **IEEE International Communication Society** will hold its annual conference, ProComm 2017, 23-26 July at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a conference theme of "Making Waves."
IEEE PCS
http://sites.ieee.org/pcs/procomm2017/
Erin.Friess@unt.edu

2 5-7 October
The **Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC)** will hold its 2017 Annual Meeting, with a conference theme of User-centered Program Design, at the Georgia Conference Center in Savannah, GA.
CPTSC
http://www.cptsc.org/annual.html
conference2017@cptsc.org

3 8-10 October
The **Public Relations Society of America** will hold its 2017 International Conference 8-10 October at the Boston Marriott Copley Place in Boston, MA.
PRSA
(212) 460-1400

4 9-13 October
The **Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES)** annual meeting, HFES 2017, will take place 9-13 October at the JW Marriot in Austin, TX.
HFES
https://www.hfes.org/web/HFESMeetings/2017annual-meeting.html

5 25-28 October
The **American Translators Association (ATA)** will hold its 58th Annual Conference 25-28 October at the Washington Hilton in Washington, DC.
ATA
https://www.atanet.org/conf/2017/
ata@atanet.org

6 1-4 November
The **American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)** will hold its 2017 Medical Writing & Communication Conference 1-4 November at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando, FL.
AMWA
conference@amwa.org
(240) 238-0940

Malcontent

BY GEOFF HART | *STC Fellow*

OF LATE, A NEW BUZZWORD has been circulating around the technical communication community like a bee in search of flowers to pollinate: *content*. "What's content?" you may be wondering. Content can be defined as information destined for written, visual, or spoken expression—indeed, for expression in any medium, since the ideal is to create information once and then communicate it in as many media as possible. I confess to being glad that someone finally applied jargon to the concept. It would have been sad if we technical communicators continued using content, as we've been doing since the dawn of our profession, without actually noticing what we were doing.

You've undoubtedly heard the hoary phrase that "change is the only constant." To update that phrase, I'd venture to state that *content* has become the only constant—since the goal is to create something constant that you can then reuse *ad nauseam*. But content changes too fast to be constant, making this, at best, an uncomfortable neologism. Actually, I'm dismayed to think I may have just committed a meta-idiom, or perhaps an outright paradox, whose content simultaneously includes the concept of stability and the concept of change. Perhaps it's best not to go there, and to let sleeping idioms lie.

As in any other young field—or perhaps any old field that's been rechristened—there's contention over the meaning of content. Predictably, a great many pundits have tried to stake out their territories in such a way as to create a market advantage by demonstrating the incompetence of their competitors. As a result, content is everywhere you look. Indeed, advocates of this new direction for technical communication are themselves full of it and eager to generate more.

Content, with emphasis on the first syllable, places perhaps too much emphasis on the *con*. But spoken with emphasis on the second syllable, it refers to a state of satisfaction, or a state of mind, as in the neologistic phrase *contentis mentis*—etymologically, a state of contentment over content. I'm good with that. It's better than being written off as just another malcontent (*non contentis mentis*). After all, even Richard III knew that the "winter of our discontent" would eventually be made glorious summer by appropriate content.

What is the working technical communicator to do while others debate and fill the Web with alt-content? Keep calm and carry on with the business of communicating with our various audiences. It's what we do, and what we'll keep doing long after something else has replaced content as our obsession *du jour*.

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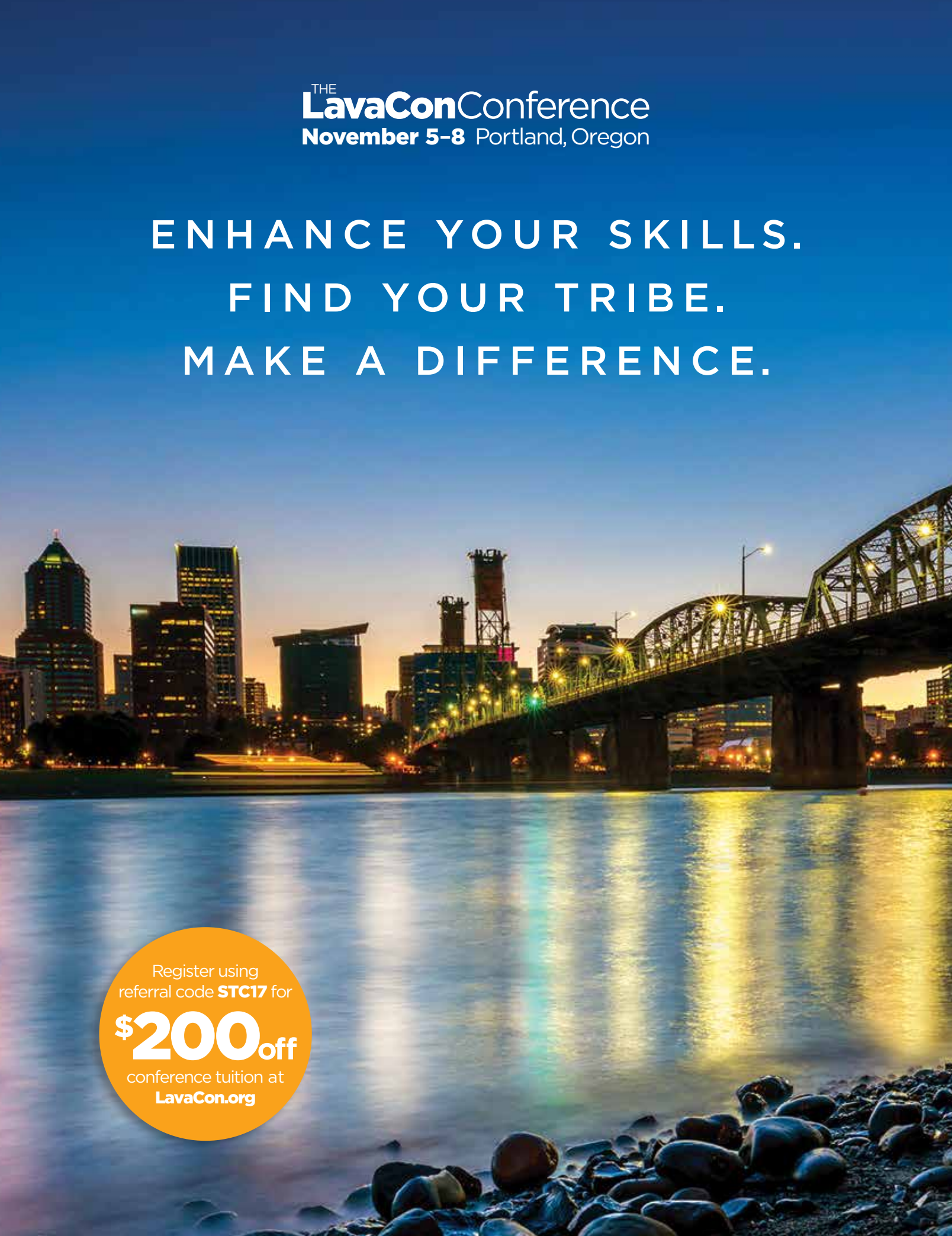

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